

Social Structural Dysfunction in the Era of COVID19; An Assessment of the Effects on Christian Churches in Ghana: A case of the Presbyterian Church of Ghana

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Abstract: Globally, the outbreak of an acute respiratory disease known as Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) adversely impacted on economies of countries and religious bodies. The emergence of the pandemic led to the interruption of most public socio-economic activities including religious gatherings, local and international flights, borders, road transportation, large commercial activities, public and private schools, among others worldwide, including Ghana. These measures sought to forestall a further spread of the disease. Suspension of religious gatherings foists considerable consequences on religious activities, especially in the developing world. In the mainstream academic discourse, scholars contended that the novel pandemic adversely affected economies of countries, but there is paucity of empirical evidence on how the pandemic has affected Christian Spirituality and religious socialization in Ghana. This study however fills this knowledge gap and unveils the possible effects of COVID-19 on Christian Spirituality in Ghana by using the Presbyterian Church of Ghana as a case. Qualitative approach was employed using data from in-depth interviews from eight (8) purposively selected respondents and four (4) regions in Ghana. The analysis revealed that, the pandemic disrupted the annual plans of churches and compelled them to alter their 2019/2020 annual plans. This affected spiritual activities like baptisms, holy matrimony and communion services, among others. It was also found that Church members had to significantly revoke their wedding schedules leading to premarital sex among especially young people. The study argues that the pandemic is a spirit-lice infestation depriving Christians of active spiritual operations. It was recommended that Church policy planners ought to broaden the scope of their programmes to accommodate supplementary programmes and activities for tackling future emergency situations like the COVID-19 pandemic.

Keywords: COVID 19, Christian spirituality, Presbyterian Church, Ghana.

I. INTRODUCTION

In December, 2019, an acute respiratory disease known as Coronavirus 2019 (COVID-19) caused by Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus-2 (SARS-CoV-2) (Rothan & Byrareddy, 2020; Zheng, Ma, Zhang & Xie, 2020) emerged in Wuhan, Hubei Province in China (Bai, Yao, Wei, Tian, Jin, Chen & Wang, 2020; Binnicker, 2020). The novel

COVID-19 began to spread rapidly throughout China in January, 2020 (Guo, Cao, Hong, Tan, Chen, Jin & Yan, 2020). Subsequently, Human-to-Human transmission of the disease received international attention with which the World Health Organization (WHO) declared the novel COVID-19 an epidemic (McIntosh, Hirsch & Bloom, 2020). In March, 2020, the world reported 87,137 confirmed cases of which 79,968 was confirmed in China alone and 7,169 outside China and 2,977 deaths (Guo et al., 2020; Salzberger, Glück, & Ehrenstein, 2020). As at 11th December, 2020, there have been approximately 69,143,017 confirmed cases globally with 1,576,516 deaths and 49,166,194 recovery cases in which America tops the list with 29,467,378 confirmed cases out of which 2,923,000 have died as at 11th December, 2020 (WHO, Coronavirus Live Trucker, 2020). In Africa, WHO reported total confirmed cases of 2,231,951, with 53,261 deaths and 1.9million recoveries by 6th December, 2020 (WHO Africa update, 2020). The continues spread of the virus globally including Ghana compelled affected countries to consider measures to control the pandemic (Ebrahim, Ahmed, Gozzer, Schlagenhauf & Memish, 2020). Some these measures include: suspension of both local and international travels, mass gathering and a halt of events such as religious gatherings which include churches and mosques being closed, restriction on social and political conferences, cultural celebrations, music festivals and lock-down of major cities (Chinazzi, Davis, Ajelli, Gioannini, Litvinova, Merler & Viboud, 2020; Ibrahim et al., 2020). Additionally, wartime strategies such as the use of national security services like the military and the police were introduced to restrict movements of people. These measures were adopted in a bid to reduce the spread of the disease (WHO, 2020). Comprehensive public health prevention measures consisted of self-quarantine, physical distancing, awareness creation on handwashing with soap and water and wearing of nose masks were recommended practices for citizens of affected countries including Ghana. Besides, suspected or affected persons were isolated from the rest of the population with the aim of monitoring the symptoms of the disease and avoid further

spread. Although, the restrictions were necessary actions towards prevention of the spread of the novel coronavirus, it imposed socio-economic hardships on countries globally, including the altering of systemic and structural set ups like routine activities of religious bodies and organizations.

Economically, the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD, 2020) reports that the unavoidable novel COVID-19 pandemic imposed considerable consequences on the world's economy. Fernandes (2020), argues that the severe spread of the disease posed serious risk to the macro-micro economy of countries through the halt of interruptions of people's movements, production of activities and cutoff of supply chains. Besides, the economic consequences of the pandemic on the economy, the social effects consisted of a halt in both local and international religious events. For example, churches, prayer camps, deliverance centers were all closed and annual seasonal Christian religious celebrations like "Easter" (birth of Christ) activities were suspended (Johnson, Gossner, Colzani, Kinsman, Alexakis, Beauté & Ekdahl, 2020). More so, European countries like Italy, France, Germany, Spain and the United Kingdom, cancelled all religious activities like church services, meetings, gatherings, pilgrimages and conferences (Remuzzi & Remuzzi, 2020). Again, the imposition of lockdown and social distancing restrictions adversely affected church services. Christian spirituality in its widest sense, can be defined as any moral values that is concretized under the influence of the Spirit of Christ (McGrath, 2013), from which the faithful attitudes or actions flow (Scorgie, Chan, Smith & Smith, 2016). The faithful readiness to live an exemplary life of Christ serves as a conduit for self-discipline which ultimately culminates into national growth and development.

In African, countries heeded to WHO's directives on serious public health actions (Gilbert, Pullano, Pinotti, Valdano, Poletto, Boëlle & Gutierrez, 2020). The directives include; contact tracing, infection prevention, follow-up, testing, treatment and isolation of both victims and suspected persons (Nkengasong & Mankoula, 2020; WHO, 2020). These measures were adopted to minimize deaths from COVID-19 (Wang, Wang, Dong, Chang, Xu & Wang, 2020). It is important to note that these restrictions by governments in Africa had profound effects on the religiosity of citizens and further limited their right to worship. Christian churches and other religious organizations resorted to online preaching to share the word of God. This resulted in malfunctioning of churches and this undeniably impacted the spiritual growth of church members during the inimical COVID-19 pandemic era.

In the Ghanaian enclave, the outbreak of the novel coronavirus commenced in March 12, 2020 and by March 25, 2020, the country recorded 68 confirmed cases with 2 deaths (Anjorin, 2020). By May 28, 2020, a total of 7, 303 confirmed cases were recorded with 34 deaths and 2, 412 recoveries (WHO Coronavirus Live Tracker, 2020). The government of Ghana on March 15, 2020 promptly responded to the global

dispersion of severe spread of the new COVID-19 pandemic by implementing airtight measures in line WHO directives to contain the spread of the virus outbreak in its jurisdiction. Some of these stringent measures include; household quarantine, hand washing, travel restrictions, wearing of nose/mouth mask, restrictions on social and mass gatherings (Armah-Attoh, Sanny & Selormey, 2020; Ozili, 2020). Also, there was an emergency declaration by the government to halt social and religious gatherings of more than 25 people, which implies Christians cannot continue their Christian lives and activities as per the norm. Christians who defied these restrictions in some urban areas in the Greater Accra and Greater Ashanti Regions were arrested and others prevented from holding church services (Setiati & Azwar, 2020). This, to some extent has affected the spiritual growth of Christians. Technically, eventful Christian spiritual activities such as Chrismation, Holy Matrimony, Funeral Services, Sacraments of Baptism and Holy Communion were banned with which funeral and Holy Matrimonial services were typically executed by 25 people. It is vital to state that the ban was enforced with variability, with some churches livestreaming to their members and the populace at large while others continued services behind closed doors. Undeniably, the restrictions have already interfered with the activities of churches, although the Christian Council of Ghana (CCG) largely embraced the restrictions. This could undoubtedly affect Christian social activities such as prayer and spiritual support for the sick, social guidance and counselling of church members and communion services which prevent deviate behaviours and social indiscipline. Therefore, key questions that remain unanswered are: how did the novel COVID-19 affect the spiritual growth of churches in Ghana? How did church leaders and members manage their spiritual growth during the time of the pandemic? What can the church and its leaders do to avert possible consequences in times of similar public health emergencies in the future? This study therefore seeks to illuminate the possible effects of the novel COVID-19 on Christian Churches in Ghana using the Presbyterian Church of Ghana as a case study.

Theoretical Underpinning: The Structural Functionalist Theory

The "Structural Functionalist" theory was adopted to undergird the study. Functionalists view society as a complex system whose parts are interdependent, interconnected and interrelated (Isajiw, 2013). The functionalists argue that parts of the society function together to promote stability and solidarity. The theorists consider social institutions (Political, Religious, Education, Marriage, Economic and Health) as groups working together to promote stability (Comte, 1975 in Aron 2017; Durkheim 2014; Spencer 1971 in Offer, 2010; Weber, 2015; Parson, 1951 in Alexander, 2014). Therefore, a defect in any part of the structure leads to social intractability which ignites social instability. Herbert Spencer linked the structure of society to the parts of the human body (Turner, 2012; Rumney, 2017). He argues that the various parts of

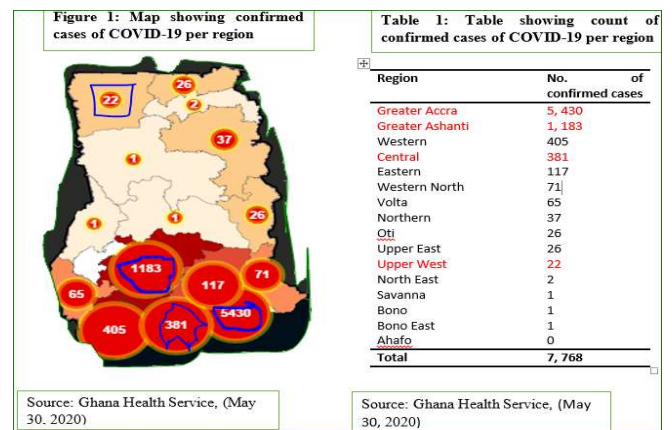
society (Social Institutions, social norms, values, or patterns of beliefs and behaviors) work together to keep society functioning, just like the organs of the human body working together to keep the body active. He laid emphasis on his analogical term “human organ” and argued that a rigorous effort to impute societal customs, practices or feature on the various parts of society propels society to function well. This view was upheld by Emile Durkheim, who, following the idea of Comte and Spencer believed that society is a complex, interdependent and interrelated system that work together to maintain stability (Durkheim, 2014). According to Durkheim, shared societal norms, values, languages, and symbols bind society together. He was emphatic in his book titled “social fact” that social laws, values, morals, religious beliefs, customs and rituals hold society together and governs the individual’s social life and social institutions (Fish, 2017; Stanner, 2017). It is argued that Durkheimian theory view society as coherent entity that is bounded by fundamental social relations (Kenny, 2010). Religiously, Durkheim defined religion as “a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred thing” (Allen, Pickering & Miller, 2012, p.8).

Durkheim further clarifies the concept “religion” as the expression of social cohesion which serves several purposes, including providing answers to spiritual mysteries, providing social interaction and socio-emotional support (McKinnon, 2014; Wallis, 2019). Durkheim’s Structural Functionalist theory and Spencer’s theory of Social Functionalism agrees with Parson’s (1951 cited in Erfina, Raharjo, Santoso & Apsari, 2019) Social Equilibrium theory which argues that, there is a dynamic working balance between the interconnected parts of society and its external body. Impliedly, there should be a persistent balance between social systems and their environments (Ormerod, 2013). This means that any change that occurs in the subsystem must suit the subsequent. Therefore, a deviation from it, triggers chaos in the social system. Summing up the central idea of the functionalists denotes that society is made up of various parts. These scholars vividly elaborated the interdependency, intertwinement and interconnectivity of parts of society, social units and organizations such as religious, political and economic organizations in Ghana and globally; hence a blip of any part might kindle deficiency in society. Comparatively, a public health deficiency like the COVID-19 Pandemic has affected the social structural set of all institutions in Ghana and the world. This further confirms the practicability and reality of the functionalist’s theorists. Even though, religion was critiqued by conflict theorist, Karl Marx as the “Opium of the Masses” (Marx & Engels, 2012; Ndonye & Nabea, 2014; Marx, 2015), Weber, in his book, “The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism” offers a different vision of religion. He argues that religion is not a tool for social oppression and economic exploitation as noted by Marx, but the ethics (beliefs, customs, values) of religion (Christianity) serves as a tool for economic empowerment and development (Berger, 2010; Buchwalter, 2013; Oluwaseun, David & Issa, 2014; Nielsen, 2016; Lata, 2020), which was used to build Europe

and American’s economy (Lata, 2020). It is worth noting that the ethics (Holy Bible) of Christianity, which is the main focus of the study, shapes the moral attitudes of citizen and instills discipline in society which leads to cushioning the effects of a problem-stricken world and ultimately promotes socio-economic growth and development.

Study Area

The study was conducted in Ghana. The country as at 2019 had 10 administrative regions and 170 administrative districts with 6 metropolitans (Ghana Statistical Service, 2012). The study focuses on the Greater Accra, Greater Kumasi, Central and Upper West Regions, specifically the Accra and Kumasi Metropolitan areas, Wa Municipality and Twifo-Praso District. The Greater Accra Metropolitan is considered the largest city in Ghana followed by Greater Kumasi Metropolitan which is considered the most populous area in Ghana (Ghana Statistical Service, 2012). These areas were chosen, because they are the main epicenters of the novel COVID-19 pandemic (Ghana Health Service, 2020). Central Region was considered as an average hotspot whereas the Upper West was considered as a lower hotspot (see figure 1 & table 1).



It is obvious from figure 1 and table 1 above that the epicenters of the devastating COVID-19 pandemic are the Greater Accra and Greater Kumasi Regions. It is important to note that these regions are the only regions that were affected by COVID-19 lockdown restrictions imposed by the president of Ghana on March 15, 2020. Additionally, most Christian churches are situated in these regions. In view of this, the researchers purposively selected high and low epicenters to compare the consequences of the pandemic on religious lives and activities in these areas.

II. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Study Approach and Design

In order to comprehensively address questions regarding the effects of the novel COVID-19 pandemic on Christian churches, specifically Presbyterian churches in Ghana, a qualitative approach and case study design was adopted for the study. The purpose was to describe the lived experiences

of church leaders regarding the phenomenon. Besides, the researchers had little control over the COVID-19 phenomenon that is being studied and this informed the use of qualitative approach and case study design (Wahyuni, 2012; Yin, 2014; 2017).

Population, Sample and Sampling Method

A sample of eight (8) church leaders who were actively involved in church activities were purposively selected from a population of 50 participants from four (4) purposively chosen regions to partake in the study. The church leaders consisted of four (4) pastors and four (4) church clerks of the selected churches. The churches were conveniently sampled whilst the leaders were purposively sampled. The church leaders were purposively sampled because they were knowledgeable in the study topic. The selection criteria were based on at least two years' experience. Leaders who fell short of this criterion were excluded (Yin, 2011 cited by Gentles, Charles, Ploeg & McKibbin, 2015).

Data Collection Instruments and Procedure

Interview guide was the instrument used to collect primary data from church leaders. Interviews were scheduled with participants on protocol basis to conveniently cater for the loaded schedules of most church leaders. Besides interview guides were used to collect primary data. Related secondary data was also gathered from scholarly journal articles, books, reports, and newspapers, periodicals, among others to supplement the primary data and also to understand empirical arguments being made in relation to the study topic.

Analytical Process and Approach

Transcription of audio recordings, cleaning and organization of field notes ensued primary data collection. Thematic analytical method was subsequently employed to categorize concepts and ideas into different themes, sub-themes and properties. Major themes and sub-themes that emerged from the categorization of concepts and sub-concepts formed the basis of analysis.

Ethical Considerations and Trustworthiness

The required research ethics and protocols were duly observed. A letter was written to select church administrative heads to seek their consents for the study. Besides, verbal consent was sought from the study participants before conducting in-depth interviews via zoom and telephone. Trustworthiness of the data collected was ensured through detailed interview instrument, prolong engagement with the study participants and member checks.

Results and Discussion

The main issues the study focused on consist of baptism/confirmation, Holy Communion, marriage, the word of the supreme God and prayer. These key issues provide a clear understanding of what constitute spirituality in the Christendom. The programmes and plans of the various churches were examined, before unearthing the important

variables.

Individual interviews conducted with the respondents revealed that most Presbyterian churches had planned their first-half of programs/activities for 2020 which was expected to start from January to June prior to the commencement of the year, 2020. The programmes were planned between October and December, 2019, after a meeting by the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of Ghana and then its implementation begun in early January, 2020. This is because early planning is very critical for churches since their plans determine the direction and focus of implementation of the day-to-day church activities. The respondents stressed that the programmes designed were guided by the church's "almanac", a national programme embodied into a single document that entails the events of the church for the year. It was found that planned church activities in the first quarter of 2020 were stalled due to the pandemic. Church leaders had to subsequently adjust by providing a strategic information to address spiritual and physical risk and allocate the necessary resources to optimize the chances for successful church programmes and activities (Pawar, Gore, Gadakh & Hemant, 2020). A respondent from Kumasi remarked that:

"As Presbyterian ministers, we are always guided by some particular pillars when designing a programme for the church, aside the almanac. We look at the spiritual, physical, economic growth and, matrimonial and social life of members before designing a strategic programme for the church. For example, if a number of members face marital or spiritual problems, a myriad of activities would be designed and geared towards these directions. I must say that, the emergence of the scary COVID-19 pandemic has highly affected the first quarter programmes, this year and there is the need for us to alter and reschedule our programmes in order to adjust to the COVID19 pandemic" (interview with a pastor, Kumasi, May 29, 2020).

The pastors comment above reemphasized the fact that prior planning of church activities are necessary for the early detection of risks and opportunities. As a result, the churches' programmes are done in phases, and each phase is inextricably connected to achieve coherence and complementarity. It was observed that a successful church programme is dependent on the availability of resources. This is in consonance with the assertion by Lines, Stone & Sullivan (2014), that the success of programmes of every organization like that of the church depends heavily on ample effort and time devoted in each phase to increase the chances of the programme being successful. It emerged from the in-depth interviews with the pastors that the pandemic has immensely interrupted church programmes. The main spiritual activities that were halted by the pandemic have been discussed beneath.

Baptism: A Holy Spiritual Ritual

It was discovered from the study that, baptism is a Christian sacrament that is marked by using water as a holy ritual of

purification. The respondents indicated that baptism is a holy spiritual ritual which signifies that a person has fully turned from the former ways of life (sins) to follow and accept the new life of Christ Jesus and has repented from his/her sins, popularly known as “Born again”. In the case of fresh babies, they are baptism to initiate them into the church as toddlers to ensure they remain holy Christians from childhood to adulthood. The emergence of the devastating COVID-19 pandemic however, highly affected the immersion or sprinkling of holy water on Christians to signify their acceptance of the new life of Christ (see table 2).

Table 2: Statistics of planned baptism and actual baptism Activities from January to June, 2020

Churches	Planned No. of Baptism	No. Baptized	No. of baptisms Re-scheduled	Re-scheduled Date
Mt. Zion, Fafraha District, Accra	6	0	6	December, 2020
Riis Congregation, Twi- Praso	4	0	4	December, 2020
Kotwi congregation, Kumasi	8	0	8	December, 2020
Epiphany Congregation	6	0	6	December
Total	24	0	24	

Source: Field interview, 2020

The data in table 2 show that all the 24 planned baptisms to officially enroll new member into the Christendom could not come off due to the novel COVID-19 pandemic. A Session Clerk disclosed in an interview that: “*mostly we organize new convert for such people for them to be rooted in Christ to accept the new life, but, the interruption of the novel inimical COVID-19 has impelled us to reschedule all activities*”. The study revealed that the church management was expecting loss of some new converts when churches resume, because, some new converts had already declined to phone calls to find out about their welfare. The respondent described the church situation amidst the pandemic era as “*a spiritual drawback that cannot be forgotten*”, meaning the pandemic had hindered the spiritual growth of members. The respondent underscored the need to restart the whole spiritual exercises when normal life commences and churches activities recommence. This shows that without the spiritual exercise (baptism), the new converts cannot commune with God as noted by Bradshaw (2013). Some respondents indicated that baptism is critical in Christendom because it qualifies a new believer to perform other important spiritual activities.

The Holy Communion

It was found that communion service is viewed as the emblem of Jesus’ Sacrifice for mankind. This occasion encompasses a wine and bread, where the wine signifies the blood Jesus shed for remission of sins of Christians and the bread denotes the body of Christ. We also discovered from the study that every

committed and dedicated believer must be able to dine with the Lord. Dinning with the lord (receiving of holy communion) was done once every month, but the ban on religious gatherings made the church management to change the frequency to four (4) times for the first half of their programmes. Three times of communion services were organized for members on the first Sunday of every month, thus from the month of January-March, 2020. Easter, one of the important celebrations of Christians to commemorate the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ was Livestreamed to members at the comfort of their homes. Two pastors shared their experiences on communion service by saying:

“I was able to organize a communion service for my members during COVID-19 restrictions on religious gatherings, this was done through home cells. I visited the members to administer the communion to them, but COVID-19 protocols (sanitization of hands & social distancing) were strictly adhered to” (interview with a pastor, Twifo Praso, May 29, 2020).

Another pastor also remarked that:

“on April 5, 2020, I informed my congregants to individually come for communion at the church premises. I waited on them to administer the communion but none on them showed up. When I inquired from them why they did not show up, they indicated that they were afraid of contracting the disease during the process of administering the communion. In fact, the emergence of the COVID-19 has crippled Christian spiritual maturity and the Christian community as a whole” (interview with a pastor, Wa, May 28, 2020).

The reverend ministers’ (pastors) willingness to administer communion to their members was because the communion is considered as a spiritual food that satisfies the faithful’s spirit and draws Christians closer to God. In-depth engagement with the respondents also revealed that the communion strengthens Christian’s souls to overcome the attack of the enemies. This finding directly supports (Bradshaw, 2007; Schwanda, 2015; Peterson, 2020) suggestions that the communion or the Lord’s Supper does not only strengthens Christians’ souls for earthly trials but it also purifies the spirituality of a partaker. This indicates that, a non-partaker’s soul is not renewed. It was also found that communion services cannot be re-arranged, for that matter, church members enjoy its benefits of confessing their sins and renewing their relationship with God. This made church members to lose spiritual contact with God during the pandemic restrictions and this could culminate into spiritual deficiency and evil attacks.

The Holy Matrimony

The holy matrimony is mainly observed as a sacramental marriage intended to bind two believers (man and woman) together for a lifelong union. Findings show that the holy matrimony signifies supremacy and authorship of God in marriages. God’s love for mankind is demonstrated through the sacred institution of marriage. It was found that the holy

matrimony is sacred and instituted by God due to the vows made by both men and the women in the church after the traditional marriage ceremony with the woman's family. According to the respondents, the holy matrimonial institution was highly affected by the pandemic. The respondents intimated clearly that approximately 16 marriage ceremonies were planned to be done in March, April and May, 2020 but could not come off. The study revealed that all the "would-be couples" had deliberately deferred their ceremonies for two reasons. First, respondents divulged in the interviews that the "would-be couples" intentionally postponed their ceremonies because; they want to ride in convoy posh cars at their wedding days. Second, they want others to support them in certain aspects of their marriages and that they cannot afford to organize the ceremony for only 25 people as authorized by the president of Ghana under the Executive Instrument (E.I. 64) of 15th March, 2020. Although, premarital sex is biblically wrong (sin), the delay and the postponement of weddings might impel Christian to engage in premarital sex before marriage. One of the respondents disclosed that:

"The COVID-19 pandemic has devastated "would-be marriages" and it might create mistrusts and probable cancellation of weddings. As it stands now, the stomach of three females of the "would-be couples" are already protruding (pregnant). They would be expected to call-off their weddings immediately churches resumed. This is a disgrace to me as a minister and counselor, and the entire Christian body, in the sense that these members were very committed and dedicated whom some members emulate, but they could not wait for the pandemic to end....." (Interview with a pastor, Kumasi, May 30, 2020).

This shows that the new COVID-19 pandemic had deleterious effects on matrimonial celebrations, especially on "would-be couples", causing them to engage in premarital sex which is frowned on by the Church in order to promote discipline among members and the youth especially. This may not augur well for the couples as it might lead to cohabitation and divorce if proper measures are not taken to tackle it. This finding is consistent with a study titled: "Saying Yes before Saying I Do: Premarital Sex and Cohabitation as a Piece of the Divorce Puzzle" by Alvare (2012), that premarital sex is an increased risk for divorce. He argued that marriages whose foundations hinged on premarital sex behaviours were associated with a 166% increased likelihood of divorce as compared with a 33% increased likelihood of divorce for marriages which were not preceded by premarital sex. Church members who had premarital sex before marriage were exempted from performing certain holy spiritual exercises like "the communion service, covenant prayers and giving sermons" unless these church members have officially and legally married. This finding agrees with the functionalist theories of Comte 1975 in Aron (2017), Durkheim (2014), Spencer 1971 in Offer (2010), Weber (2015) & Parson 1951 in Alexander (2014), that when one part of society fails to function, it affects other parts of the interconnected social structural

systems.

Prayers and Sharing of God's Word

Christian prayer is a communication between a believer and God. Evidence from this study has shown that prayer and God's word are inextricably intertwined. Thus; the word of God serves as a driving force for members to communicate (pray) with their holy father-Jesus Christ. Moore (2009) relates prayer and God's word to two sticks of dynamites which help Christians to demolish the stronghold of Satan. In this sense, in-depth engagement with the respondents revealed that the pandemic made it impossible for churches to organize revival, church prayer and individual-prayer meetings. Two Session Clerks from Wa and Kumasi respectively disclosed this: *"our mini harvest revival services scheduled for 29th March, 2020 were revoked in addition to our weekly Tuesday and Friday prayer meetings". "our planned Easter revival (April 6-12, 2020) and Pentecost revival (May 29-31, 2020) services in tandem with prayer meetings organized every Friday for church members as the custom of the Presbyterian Church of Ghana were all cancelled"*. It was found the only option, the church management had was to reschedule these programmes and open church auditoriums for individual prayers. However, few church members patronize these adjusted activities. It was found that individuals who were desirous for spiritual support through prayers were reached by pastors and church leaders via phone calls, but the calls were at times constrained by poor networks. This has the potential of reducing church members' spiritual growth, since they may not be praying frequently for spiritual upliftment as they opt to. Wright (2013), made similar observation about members inability to pray amidst trials and emphasized that a Christian without cooperate prayer(s) experiences no peace.

Again, the study found that reverend ministers were restrained by the imposition of the pandemic restrictions by state authorities. The respondents held the view that it was impossible to organize normal church services to regularly share the word of God with members. This view exerts considerable influence on church leaders to devise outreach as a strategic means to reach out to members to meditate and study the word of God. The strategies included; livestreaming, formation of home and family (nuclear) cells. The livestream platforms include; WhatsApp, Facebook-live, YouTube and the use of the social media such as Television and Frequency Modulation (FM) radios. A pastor disclosed his reason for resorting to FM stations *"I formed home prayer-cells, but a group reported to be called "stop the spread of COVID-19" teamed up with area boys to embark on demonstration against the prayer-cells"*. This coerced him to finally resort to family-cells where God's word is shared among family members with a family head spearheading the service. The respondents indicated that many church-members failed to practice this devotional strategy. This suggests that leaders' inability to reach out to all members with the word of God could lead to immorality among members. Incidents of gender-based violence among couples were also found to be rampant. This

is because, the norms and ethics of religion (Christianity) which serve as a catalyst for ensuring social solidarity and social discipline without which social discipline such as morality could malfunction as professed by the functionalists like Durkheim (2014), and Weber (2015), are scarcely 1. preached and meditated. It is important to note that the pandemic has become a spirit-lice infestation gradually lapping spiritual-food from spirit-filled lives of Christians.

III. CONCLUSION

The study sought to find out the possible effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on Christian-spirituality in Ghana by using the Presbyterian Church of Ghana as a case. The results of the study revealed that the programmes of all the selected churches were highly affected by the pandemic. Thus, programmes earmarked for spiritual activities, such as the communion services, revival services, marriage ceremonies, sharing and studying of God's word, baptism and prayer meetings which were part of the first-half of the year's 2. programme were altered due to the imposition of COVID-19 restrictions. This caused member churches to either cancel or reschedule the year's programme. For example, baptism, a spiritual exercise that symbolically ushers new members into the Christendom was suspended and rescheduled, communion services, prayers and sermons were livestreamed to members, holy matrimony arrangements were suspended with which some members had to significantly revoke their wedding schedules because of premarital sex engagement. In the light of this, it is recommended that church policy planners and practitioners should consider a holistic plan to include contingencies and public health emergencies/crisis like the novel pandemic. The stakeholders of the Church should also develop a supplementary programme to accompany the original programme to tackle future eventualities. There is the need for Christian Churches to educate their members on the need to allocate time for watching and listening to livestreamed Christian messages. The government of Ghana and Christian-based Non-Governmental Organization (NGOs) stakeholders should support church leaders to digitize some Christian activities for easy accessibility and to promote holistic socio-economic development of Ghana and the world as a whole.

Contribution to Scholarship

This study is relevant and useful because it contributes to knowledge on social systems dysfunction arising from a global pandemic like COVID-19. More so, it complements existing literature on the adverse effects of COVID-19 on religious activities and social systems in Ghana and globally. This research also gives comprehensive insights into the contribution of religion to the spiritual growth of individuals and societies and how this translates into socio-economic growth and development of countries, especially Ghana.

IV. SUGGESTIONS

Suggestions to Curb Effects of Covid-19 on Christian

Churches in Ghana

The following are key suggestions for combating the effect of COVID-19 on the Christian churches in Ghana:

1. There is the need for Christian churches to develop a comprehensive plan to incorporate emergency public health challenges such as COVID-19 and others possible constraints. This could lessen the adverse effects on social units like churches.

2. It is also necessary for Christian churches to either embark on or intensify digital telecast of church activities such as sermons, baptism, holy matrimony, counselling, naming ceremony's, among others. Besides, other social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, among others which are alternative approaches to sustain and maintain spiritual needs of church members and other interested listeners in times of global health crisis like COVID-19.

3. The capacities of church leaders should also be improved to effectively handle alternative mediums of delivering church activities.

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